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ABSTRACT

This document begins with an overview of trends and issues in the area of adult literacy. This overview briefly addresses: the number of adult illiterates, the costs of adult illiteracy, adult illiteracy as a barrier to increasing U.S. competitiveness, efforts that have focused on adult illiteracy, the issues that have surfaced, and recommendations to reduce adult illiteracy. A list follows of resources that provide information about adult literacy. Print resources available from ERIC are listed by author, with title, place of publication and publisher or source, date, and ED or EJ number. Similar information is provided for several non-ERIC print resources. In addition, a listing is provided of organizations that can be contacted for further information. Addresses and telephone numbers are included. (YLB)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS

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ADULT LITERACY

An Overview of Trends and Issues

Since President Reagan announced the Adult Literacy Initiative in September 1983, the high illiteracy rate among American adults has received national attention. It is estimated that 2.3 million adults each year join the existing pool of those 27 million adults who are functionally illiterate. The individual, social, and economic costs of adult illiteracy are high. Many illiterate and low-literate adults fail to achieve their individual potential and frequently are unable to participate fully in society. Adult illiteracy is also recognized as a barrier to increasing U.S. competitiveness. One-fifth or more of all adult workers probably need improvement in their basic skills to become fully productive in the workplace.

A number of efforts have focused attention on adult illiteracy. In addition to the National Adult Literacy Initiative, other major programs include the Business Council for Effective Literacy, formed as a vehicle to involve businesses in literacy programs in local communities; the Coalition for Literacy, an 11-member organization that cooperated with the American Association of Advertising Agencies on a nationwide media campaign; and Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS), a national media outreach literacy program sponsored by ABC and PBS.

As a result of these efforts, a number of key issues related to adult literacy education have surfaced: the characteristics of illiterate adults, the use of volunteers in literacy education programs, the impact of changing technology on literacy skills needed to function in the workplace, the need for more effective evaluation mechanisms, and the need for better linkages and communication within the field of adult literacy education. A significant reduction in adult illiteracy depends upon increased research activity, the development of new coalitions, and increased emphasis on prevention.

This **Trends and Issues Alert** contains a number of resources that provide information about adult literacy. Included are print resources as well as organizations that can be contacted for further information.

ERIC Resources

Balmuth, Miriam. *Essential Characteristics of Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Review and Analysis of the Research.* Brooklyn, NY: Kingsborough Community College, 1986. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 273 823)

Cervero, Ronald M. "Is a Common Definition of Adult Literacy Possible?" *Adult Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1985): 50-54. (ERIC No. EJ 321 874)

Fingeret, Arlene. *Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions.* Information Series no. 284. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1984. (ED 246 308)

Fox, Michael. *A Look at Illiteracy in America Today–The Problem, the Solutions, the Alternatives.* Washington, DC: Push Literacy Action Now, Inc., 1986. (ED 279 792)

Goudreau, Nancy. "Improve Your Adult Literacy Instruction by Vitalizing the Research." *Lifelong Learning* 10, no. 3 (November 1986): 17-20. (EJ 342 187)

Goudreau, Nancy. "Improve Your Adult Literacy Instruction by Vitalizing the Research: Part II." *Lifelong Learning* 10, no. 4 (January 1987): 11-14. (EJ 344 859)

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Ilsley, Paul. *Adult Literacy Volunteers: Issues and Ideas.* Information Series no. 301. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1985. (ED 260 303)

Kozol, Jonathan. *Where Stands the Republic? Illiteracy: A Warning and a Challenge to the Nation's Press.* Atlanta, GA: Cox Enterprises, Inc., 1986. (ED 281 029)

Mikulecky, Larry. "The Status of Literacy in Our Society." Paper presented at the 36th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Austin, TX, December 5, 1986. (ED 281 182)

Norman, Charles, and Malicky, Grace. "Literacy as a Social Phenomenon: Implications for Instruction." *Lifelong Learning* 9, no. 7 (May 1986): 12-15. (EJ 333 940)

Ryan, John. "Some Key Problems in Adult Literacy." *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1985): 375-381. (EJ 332 206)

Smith, Patricia H., and others. *Illiteracy in America: Extent, Causes, and Suggested Solutions.* Washington, DC: National Advisory Council on Adult Education, 1986. (ED 276 820)

Valentine, Thomas. "Adult Functional Literacy as a Goal of Instruction." *Adult Education Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1986): 108-113. (EJ 326 201)

Other Resources

Adult Literacy Education in the United States. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1987.

Chall, Jeanne S.; Heron, Elizabeth; and Hilferty, Ann. "Adult Literacy: New and Enduring Problems." *Phi Delta Kappan* 69 (November 1987): 190-196.

Enhancing Adult Literacy: A Policy Guide. Washington, DC: Council of State Policy and Planning Agencies, 1987.

Holmes, Barbara J.; Walker, Sherry; and McQuaid, Patrick. *Solutions in Progress: Results of a Survey of Literacy Programs and Activities.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1987.

Resource Organizations

Association for Community-Based Education, 1806 Vernon Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009 (202/462-6333).

Business Council for Effective Literacy, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, 35th Floor, New York, NY 10020 (212/512-2415 or 2412).

Coalition for Literacy, American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611 (312/944-6780).

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (614/486-3655; toll free outside Ohio 800/848-4815).

Laubach Literacy Action, 1320 Jamesville Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210 (315/422-9121).

Literacy Volunteers of America, 5795 Widewaters Pkwy., Syracuse, NY 13214- 1846 (315/445-8000).

National Adult Education Volunteer Network, Mary W. Seibles, Coordinator, Division of Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, 522 Reporters Bldg., 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202 (202/732-2413).

National Adult Literacy Initiative, Karl O. Haigler, Director, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202 (202/732-2959).

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
The Ohio State University · 1960 Kenny Road · Columbus, Ohio 43210
Tel (614) 486-3655
Toll-free: (800) 848-4815